



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of Center in Dushanbe, Alain Couanon

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 11, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for this very comprehensive and concise report on the activities of the Center. I really liked this one. You are crisp, clear and direct. You delivered something that is basically two-pronged and I will respond to it in that sort of structure.

The United States of course supports fully the Center in Dushanbe and its work across the entire range of OSCE activities. We encourage you, Mr. Ambassador, and your team to continue to maintain a balanced approach in programming in all three dimensions, and we look forward to working with the Center on a full range of activities in the future.

We are pleased to see that Tajikistan has taken some steps to further democratic reform. While we are encouraged by President Rahmanov's statement that Tajikistan is committed to holding free, democratic, and transparent elections in November, the election will be judged on the quality of the process. Like you, Mr. Ambassador, we too hope the Tajik government will implement swiftly ODIHR recommendations made following last year's parliamentary election. We support the Center's activities to promote political dialogue and assist Tajikistan in meeting its election commitments.

As the 1991 Moscow Document states, independent media are essential to a free and open society and are of particular importance in safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is crucial that all citizens of Tajikistan have unhindered access to independent media sources well in advance of the November elections in order for the election to meet OSCE and other international standards. Though some independent regional television stations operate in Tajikistan, registering a national independent television station would be an important step in ensuring a diversity of views, or the dissemination of a diversity of views.

The United States supports strongly the activities the Center is undertaking to assist the Government of Tajikistan to advance democratic reform and to ensure principles of democracy and respect for human rights are institutionalized and protected. Genuine political dialogue must embrace all political parties as well as civil society. Paragraph 43 of the 1991 Moscow Document states that participating States will facilitate the ability of non-governmental organizations "to conduct their national activities freely on their territories." The Center's efforts in assisting the Government of Tajikistan to create an environment in which civil society can operate freely are vital. In particular, we support the Center's work with Tajik authorities and civil society regarding recent draft laws on freedom of association and religion.

The Center's programs in the political-military and security dimension are valuable as well. Tragically, hundreds of people have been killed or injured by land mines in Tajikistan over the last decade. We would like to reiterate our strong support for OSCE's continued work with its various mine action projects in Tajikistan.

The Center's activities in the economic and environmental dimension are also of great importance, and are an area where OSCE can and should increase its cooperation with Tajikistan. Projects that promote cross-border commerce are particularly useful in this regard. In the environmental area, we support, for example, the Center's plans to address the problems associated with several unsecured uranium tailings sites that pose a hazard to the population's health and environment in Tajikistan's northern region.

I want to thank you again for your assessment and assure you that you and your team have the support for all the efforts you are making. But I want to address the other prong that I so very much welcome in a report from the Head of an OSCE Mission, and that is the other subjects you mentioned: the frequent travel requirements at a cost of 3,000 euros or more, salaries of the local staff being low, and the problems associated with IRMA. These are so good to hear about from you in my opinion because we are working on a number of things with regards to the restructuring or reforming of the OSCE. It is wonderful to hear from you concerns like that, which surely must be addressed if we are in the business, as my Russian colleague and I were speaking this morning, of making this as efficient an organization as it possibly can be. We want to make your life easy so you can do what you do very well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.